

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

**Please amend the claims as follows:**

1 (currently amended). An optical connector, comprising:

a probe comprising a rigid support encasing an optical fiber

a receptacle formed from a material softer than said rigid support, said receptacle comprising an opening to receive said probe; and

a sleeve lining an inner wall of said opening directly against the material softer than said rigid support, and wherein an end of the sleeve is flush with the opening,

wherein said sleeve is substantially cylindrical in shape and has a C-shaped cross section.

2 (cancelled).

3 (currently amended). The optical connector as recited in claim ~~2~~ 1 wherein said sleeve comprises one of a ceramic and a metal.

4 (currently amended). The optical connector as recited in claim ~~2-1~~ wherein said sleeve comprises brass.

5 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 3 wherein said connector comprises one of an SC connector and an LC connector.

6 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 5 wherein said sleeve is a press-fit sleeve.

7 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 3 wherein said receptacle comprises injection molded plastic.

8 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 7 wherein said injection molded plastic comprises polyetherimide (PEI).

9 (currently amended). A method for fortifying an optical connector, comprising:

encasing a fiber optic within a rigid probe;

forming a receptacle with a plastic having an opening to receive said rigid probe; and

fitting a sleeve flush within said opening directly against the plastic to protect said plastic from said rigid probe; and

forming said sleeve having a substantially cylindrical shape and having a C-shaped cross section with a gap along one side.

10 (cancelled).

11 (currently amended). The method as recited in claim ~~10~~ 9 wherein said fitting comprises:

compressing said sleeve to close said gap; and  
pressing said sleeve into said opening.

12 (original). The method as recited in claim 11 wherein said sleeve comprises one of a metal and a ceramic.

13 (original). The method as recited in claim 11 wherein said sleeve comprises brass.

14 (original). The method as recited in claim 11 further comprising:  
forming said receptacle from injection molded plastic.

15 (original). The method as recited in claim 14 wherein said plastic comprises polyetherimide (PEI).

16 (currently amended). A small form factor (SFF) pluggable connector for an optical system, comprising:

a male plug comprising a fiber optic encased in a rigid probe;

one of an SC and LC female receptacle formed from injection molded plastic, said receptacle comprising an opening to receive said probe; and

a press fitted sleeve lining an inner wall of said opening directly against the injection molded plastic to protect said injection molded plastic from direct contact with probe, wherein an end of the sleeve is flush with the opening,

wherein said press fitted sleeve comprises a generally cylindrical in shape having a C-shaped cross section.

17 (original). A SSF pluggable connector as recited in claim 16, wherein said injection molded plastic comprises polyetherimide (PEI).

18 (cancelled).

19 (original). A SSF pluggable connector as recited in claim 16 wherein said press fitted sleeve comprises one of a metal and a ceramic.

20 (original). A SSF pluggable connector as recited in claim 16 wherein said press fitted sleeve comprises brass.